Outlining a paper makes writing easier for the writer and, hopefully, the argument clearer for the reader once the full paper is written. In this handout, four steps for incorporating outlining into your writing process will be explained. Then an example of an outline will be provided.

1. **Write Your Thesis**
   Do not wait to start formulating your argument. As you read, you will develop ideas for a thesis, write them down. A working thesis, however rough, will guide the research process. If your thesis is arguing a certain angle or about a certain text, then works that do not address that issue can be set aside.

2. **Write Your Methodology Statement**
   When you have written your thesis, write your methodology statement. Again, this is immediate. As soon as you write a possible thesis statement, write down the major points needed to support the argument. This will help to weed out poor thesis statements and guide your research. If you cannot make decent supporting points, then the thesis needs to be reworked. If you can make strong supporting points, then those are the areas that need to be researched.

3. **Make Your Headings**
   The first level subheadings should align with the main points of your methodology statement(s). Align them even down to the wording for each point. On the document that contains your working thesis and methodology statements, make the first level headings. Write and notate your research under these headings so that your argument stays organized. This also helps to create a rough draft even as you are researching.

4. **Detail and Revise**
   Research will change your main points. As this happens, change the outline of the paper. Sometimes a main point cannot be argued or does not support your thesis. Then you must change your methodology point, thesis, or (most often) both. This should also change the heading for that section.
   
   Once you have sufficient research/data to make one of the main points, write that section. As you write, make sure that each paragraph contributes to the main point. Often, it is helpful to have an outline statement in the first paragraph of the section to list the sub points that each paragraph makes to contribute to the main point. Again, writing these paragraphs can frequently change the main point. Sometimes the research doesn’t address the point you wanted to make initially or the argument shifts slightly from what you laid out. When that happens, do not be afraid to change. The paragraphs must support the main point. If the main point changes, make sure that it still supports the thesis. If not, change the thesis or make a different main point.
Research papers are stacked arguments. Supporting sentences provide data and arguments for the topic sentence of the paragraph. The topic sentences of the paragraphs support the main point of the section and the main point of each section supports the thesis of the paper.

Here is a sample outline:

**GODS AND HEIRS: THE THEME OF PROGENY IN JOB**

**Thesis:** I will argue that Job’s friends reference the destruction of his family in the dialogues to illustrate the divine retribution principle by tying God’s control over human progeny to the barrenness of Job’s household.

**Methodology:** First, an outline of the significance of family death and God’s blessing of progeny in the Old Testament (OT) and ancient Near East. Second, the divine destruction of Job’s family and his inability to restore them in Job 1. Third, the most prominent references to Job’s children in the dialogues. Fourth, the restoration of Job’s family in the epilogue.

**Death of the Family in the OT and Ancient Near East**

1. Need for heirs is a common theme.\(^2\)
   a. Cause of distress in the OT
   b. Large family is a blessing from God in the OT
   c. Divine control over progeny is a focus in the phrasing and patriarchal blessing formulas
2. The father’s name exists so long as it is attached to land
   a. Inheritance of family property for father’s household
   b. Daughters of Zelophehad
   c. Children and inheritance focus rather than the individual children themselves
3. Ugaritic texts
   a. Kirta Epic and Tale of Aqhat briefly summarized
   b. Both contain plea for eternal continuation of family line
   c. Both call to the gods as the source of progeny and eternal life through heirs
4. Ancient Near East curse treaties
   a. Hittite treaty curse formulas
   b. Agricultural imagery
   c. Focus upon God’s ability to end the line of the offender by withholding heirs
5. Family is emphasized more than physical health in the ANE (summary paragraph)
   a. Modern readers emphasize Job’s illness but only see family at the beginning and end

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2. The numbered lines are paragraph topics while the lettered points are the supporting sentences/points within the paragraphs.
b. With ANE background, ancient readers would have seen the family death more clearly